

Fairbury Photographer Ferguson Had Interesting Family Story

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For: Fairbury Blade Newspaper
Date: June 29, 2020

Alexander A. Frerksen was born in 1861 in Germany. He emigrated from Germany to the Moline, Illinois, area around 1870. His first wife was Rena Frerksen. In 1899 in Moline, Alexander sought and received a divorce from Rena. Infidelity was the reason for the divorce.

Mary Frances Fugate (1874-1950) was born in Des Moines, Iowa, in 1874. She married Charles A. Dangerfield in 1896 in Moline. They had one child, Russell Dangerfield. They then divorced. Alexander Frerksen married Mary Fugate in 1903. Son Russell Dangerfield lived with Alexander and Mary after they married. Three sons were born to Alexander and Mary. They were Holis, Gilbert Clarence, and Walter Alexander Frerksen.

Alexander Frerksen was a well-known businessman in Moline. He initially operated a small popcorn store located in front of his house in downtown Moline. In 1907, Alexander sold the popcorn stand at Sixteenth Street and Third Avenue to Chris Dolan. While the sale was in progress, the old corn popper broke down. Mr. Frerksen took the old popper home and replaced it with another operating one. When the new owner, Mr. Dolan, inspected the popcorn stand, he noticed the old popper had been replaced. Mr. Dolan demanded that Alexander return the old popper. Mr. Frerksen explained the old popper had broke and that he had replaced it with another unit. Mr. Frerksen refused to give the old popcorn popper to Mr. Dolan. The old popper had been purchased in 1900 for \$2.00.

The fight to return the old popper dragged on until each side engaged attorneys. Mr. Dolan filed a civil suit against Alexander for \$10. The Judge allowed for \$1 in damages, and court costs of \$3.60 were assigned to be paid by Alexander. Although Mr. Dolan said the popper was worth \$10 to him, Alexander said it was only worth fifty-cents to him, so he gave it to Mr. Dolan instead of paying him \$1.00. The ownership of the fifty-cent popper was settled at the cost of \$3.60 and attorney's fees.

After selling the popcorn stand, Alexander Frerksen opened another shop that sold cigarettes, smoking tobacco, and fruit. In 1911, burglars broke in and stole most of the store's items, including a box of 250 cigarettes.

Walter and his brother Gilbert decided to try their hand at Vaudeville. Walter played the ukulele, and Gilbert played the banjo. They speculated that Frerksen would not be an acceptable stage name, so they changed their last names to Ferguson. Unfortunately, the name change did not help them become successful in Vaudeville.

By 1935, Walter Ferguson was living in Chicago. In 1936, at the age of 23, Walter married Catherine June Beal in Crown Point, Indiana, just southeast of Chicago. Miss Beal was from Odell, Illinois.

On his World War II draft registration card, Walter indicated that he and his wife Catherine lived at 1940 East 73rd Street in Chicago, Illinois. Walter also was working as a photographer at the Nugent and Graham Studios at 43 East Ohio Street in Chicago.

In the 1940 U.S. Census, Walter reported that he finished the second year of high school. He was employed as a photographer in Chicago and had an annual income of \$1,300. This salary would be equivalent to \$24,040 in today's dollars. While they were living in Chicago, Walter and Catherine had two children, Judith and Leonard Ferguson.

In 1956, Walter and Catherine moved their family from Chicago to Fairbury. Walter wanted to raise his children in a rural community compared to the South Side of Chicago. Walter took a job as a photographer at Record Printing in Fairbury. This company was in the two brick buildings just southwest of Dave's Supermarket. In that era, a significant part of the business of Record Printing was fulfilling the printing needs of Honeggers.

The Ferguson family initially lived in Fairbury. They then moved to a farmhouse owned by Eli Meiss. Son Leonard Ferguson learned how to drive a tractor, disc the fields, bale hay, and haul wagon loads of beans at harvest time.

Two years after moving to Fairbury, daughter Judith Ferguson married William Goembel from Strawn in 1958. She died in June of 2019. Her husband passed away in 2006.

In 1964, Fairbury-Cropsey High School put on a play titled "Time Out for Ginger." Leonard Ferguson acted in this play. Other high school actors included Sally Dowlen, Geoff Victor, Sylvia Miller, Barbara Roth, Claudia Oprondek, John McDonald, James Wall, and Charles Shelby.

Leonard Ferguson left Fairbury in 1965 to join the U.S. Air Force. He got stationed in Hawaii in 1967 and has lived there ever since.

Walter "Wally" Ferguson enjoyed playing golf at the Fairbury Indian Creek Golf Course. Starting in 1962, Walter won several awards at various golfing events.

A historical review of the Blade found that Wally Ferguson was the photographer for at least 17 Fairbury weddings between 1963 and 1970. Between 1961 and 1963, Mrs. Walter Ferguson was recognized in the Blade several times for helping at various Fairbury charity events. Catherine Ferguson worked at Walton's in Fairbury for many years.

In March of 1976, Wally Ferguson made a phone call to the Blade office in Fairbury. He told the Blade that he and Catherine were soon moving to Tucson, Arizona. Wally included his new address in Tucson so Fairbury friends could correspond with them.

Catherine Ferguson died in Tucson, Arizona, in September of 1987. She was 68 years old. Walter Ferguson died in 1995 in Tucson at the age of 82. His wedding photos taken between 1963 and 1970 are still treasured possessions of many Fairbury families.



Alexander A. Frerksen's Confectionary Store
Circa 1898
1514 Fifth St., Moline, Illinois